

Carr. Mathieson, Alexander
Parr

A

S E R M O N,

OCCASIONED BY

The Death

OF THE LATE

MR. ROBERT WATSON,

PREACHED IN

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, MONTREAL,

APRIL 8TH, 1827.

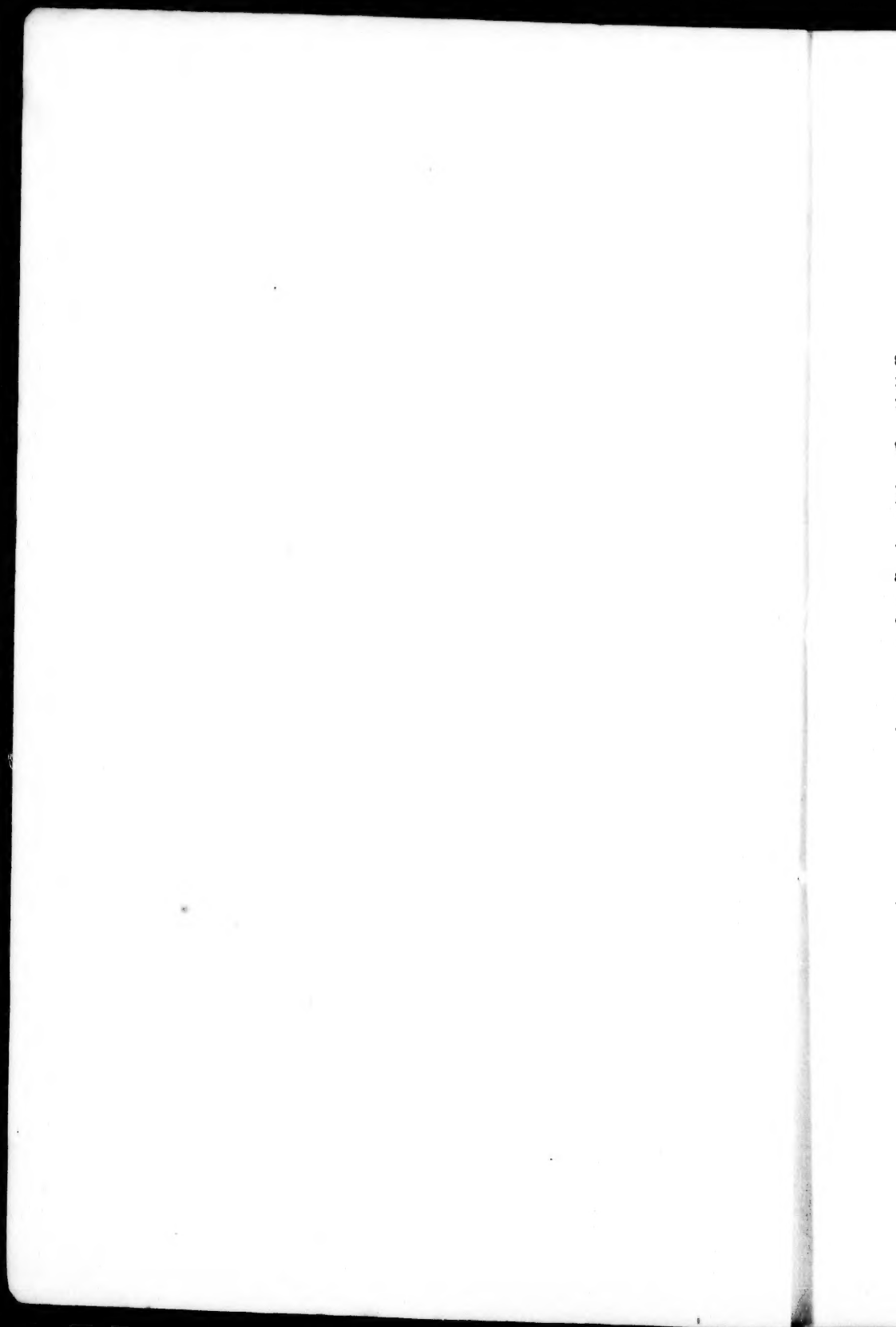
BY

ALEXANDER MATHIESON, A. M.

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PREFACE.

The circumstances which gave occasion to the following Sermon, are yet fresh in the recollection of the inhabitants of this city, and its neighbourhood ; and were of a character likely to preserve them much longer from oblivion, than most of the occurrences in life. It will be remembered, that Mr. Watson, at the moment he received the wound which terminated so fatally, and the Writer, were in the same room, engaged in conversation. The shock which the latter person's feelings received from a transaction, every feature of which was calculated to excite alarm, and distract the attention even of those who were not so immediately in contact with it ; rendered it peculiarly difficult for him, to bring his mind, for sometime afterwards, to bear closely upon any subject. It was under this disadvantage, in the discharge of ordinary duty ; and solely with a design to make a suitable improvement of the melancholy event, that the following reflections were drawn up, —and with no view whatever to publication. Aware too, that he could have little time to make such alterations, or corrections, as would make them fit for public inspection ; it was not till after he had been repeatedly solicited by individuals whom he did not wish to disoblige ; that he at last consented to have them printed.

It is more to account for the length of time that has elapsed since this discourse was preached, and to serve as a key to some allusions in it, than with a view to soften down the asperity of criticism ; that these remarks are made. However much he might be inclined to plead for mercy, in behalf of a production which he is convinced so much requires it,—he is aware that he can have no legitimate claim on the lenity of the public, having it in his power to withhold the discourse, or to submit it to their judgment, as he pleases ; and therefore, so soon as he resolves to submit it, is fairly responsible for all its errors and imperfections. He cannot say, that he is altogether insensible to public opinion, but whatever the public may think of the following sheets, he is conscious that he is more concerned, that they may be productive in some degree of the beneficial effects, with a view to which they were written,—than to obtain celebrity by them ; which he knows well they are but ill-calculated to procure. But of this, it is the prerogative of the reader to judge for himself.

Montreal, 22d May, 1827.



A
SERMON
ON
The Death
OF THE LATE
MR. ROBERT WATSON.

“FOR DEATH HATH COME UP INTO OUR WINDOWS.”

JEREMIAH, IX, 21.

“THE whole race of man is doomed to dissolution, and we are all fast hastening to our long home.” This is a truth of which we have daily demonstration;—a truth which is no less obvious to the heedless and the unthinking, than it is to the wisest and most learned of the children of men. Yet obvious as it is; the Almighty considered it of such incalculable importance to man, that he commanded his prophet, to make a solemn proclamation of it to his people:—“And the voice said, Cry; and he said, what shall I cry?—All flesh is grass, and all the godliness thereof is as the flower of the field:—The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.”* Though the vanity and insufficiency of every thing earthly, is thus solemnly announced—though there is not an occurrence in life but what is calculated to remind us of it; yet it is a truth which

* Isaiah XL. 6, 7, 8.

young and old, rich and poor, alike disregard. They are so absorbed either in the pursuit, or in the enjoyment of what is present and sensible, that in these alone, they seem to expect a substantial and enduring good. They seem to have no hope, but what this transitory world affords; no anticipation, beyond the dark and dreary precincts of the grave.

All, however, will in theory, admit the uncertainty and the unsatisfactory nature of all sublunary enjoyments. They will, without hesitation, tell you, they know full well that they must die—that they must quit those scenes endeared to them by many a fond recollection, and those friends linked to their happiness by many a tender tie,—that the time will sooner or later come, when they must relinquish the hopes, and prospects, and enjoyments, that now excite their industry, and rouse their exertion, and gratify their wishes; and that, at the stern command of Death, they must submit to lie down in the cold and silent grave, and become the companions of corruption, and the banquet of the noisome worm. They will also, with but few exceptions, tell you that they are firmly persuaded, that this life forms but a comparatively small portion of our existence;—that the soul shall return to God who gave it, to be judged according to the rules of immutable justice;—that the body shall not forever slumber in the dust, but that, by the power of the Almighty, it shall be awakened to new life; and that it will, throughout the endless ages of eternity, either suffer the punishment of unexpiated guilt, or enjoy the rewards of a blessed immortality.

There is an awfulness, and a mysteriousness investing our ideas of eternity, especially if its boundless prospect be viewed in connection with our own existence, that one would think would be sufficient to check our mad career of inconsideration, and dispose us to think seriously of, and prepare for our future state of being. Yet, with so much evidence before us, attesting the certainty of a life to come and that fact itself, involving so many considerations which ought to

give a seriousness and solemnity to our thoughts and conduct ; we still run on in a course of heedlessness and folly, and we industriously try to exclude from our view those prospects, that are at once most certain and most awful ; or, if we view them at all, it is through the long vista of intervening years, which all fancy to lie between themselves, as individuals, and these dread realities. Whatever concern we manifest on this subject, it is less frequently for ourselves than for others. Whatever apprehension of danger we feel, on most occasions, it is only for others. Here, alone, we lose that selfishness which in every thing else is inseparable from our conduct ; and though we ourselves may be placed in the same, or perhaps even more perilous circumstances, we seldom or never imagine that the danger can come nigh to us. If we are young, life and happiness are yet in prospect ; and hope and fancy spread before us such banquets of anticipated bliss, that we have scarcely a thought to bestow on any subject, that is not immediately associated with their enjoyment. If we have arrived at the age of manhood, in the full confidence of health and strength, we put the day far from us, that must sever us from all those we love on this side of time. If our "days are dwindled to the shortest span ;" if our bodily vigour has failed us, and our intellectual energy is gone, and the hoary blossoms of the grave, thinly scattered on our wrinkled brow, mournfully announce, that we must be soon gathered to our fathers ; still we feel ourselves so identified with the things around us, that we can scarcely believe that we will ever be separated from them. Like the aged ivy, that plants its fibres more deeply, as time consumes and crumbles down the frail fabric which supports it ; so we cling more closely to the vanities of life, in proportion as age enfeebles our grasp ; and even when tottering on the brink of the grave, we continue to hope that many days of earthly enjoyment will yet be extended to us.

Thus, though all men will readily admit, that sublunary enjoyments are equally uncertain and unsatisfactory ; yet all pursue them with the greatest avidity. This monstrous inconsistency between our pro-

fessions and our practice,—this decided preference which we give to the mean and perishing things of this life, arises, unquestionably, from the want of a just perception, and a heart-felt conviction of their worthlessness and insignificance, in comparison with the things of eternity. It is well known, that a mere speculative belief has little or no power over our actions. But were we impressed with the full and abiding conviction, “that the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen are eternal,”—that the happiness which these afford is fully commensurate to our immortal desires; and that the pleasures, which those yield, are all “vanity and vexation of spirit;”—and, thus convinced, did we feel ourselves placed in the situation of beings who had a deep and personal interest in these truths; we are so constituted, that all those energies which the natural, and the universal desire of happiness brings into exertion, would be diverted from the pursuit of wealth, of power, of fame, of worldly grandeur, and sensual pleasures, to the kingdom of God and his righteousness. But we have not by nature this influential conviction, nor do we give ourselves up to that calm and serious reflection, by which, the Spirit of God usually produces it on the mind of man. This is a disposition of mind which the sinner is averse to cherish, because it exhibits his weakness, his wickedness, and his folly, in a light which is too mortifying to his pride and vanity. It creates an anxiety and an uneasiness about his condition, which ill suits with that spiritual lethargy into which sin has plunged him; and it checks the free and uncontrolled indulgence in those illicit pleasures to which he has become habitually attached. It is, too, a disposition of mind to which many of the circumstances of life are uncongenial; and can never be vigorously exercised amid the noise and bustle—the vanities and pleasures—the cares and crosses of active life.

Circumstances, however, often occur, which force upon the mind more serious thoughts and feelings, notwithstanding this rooted aversion to receive and entertain them,—circumstances that are calculat-

ed to revive a sense of our responsibility to an all-wise and holy God; and the personal interest we all have in the dread realities of eternity. When disappointments cloud our prospects, and the tears of affliction bedim our eyes—when the appalling evidences of mortality are under our immediate notice, and, as it were, present visibly before us the grim King of Terrors,—then, in spite of the solicitations of sin, and the cravings of our evil habits; the mind is led to reflection, and brought to feel the utter vanity of human enjoyments; and taught to look beyond the grave, for something more real, more permanent, more satisfactory, than all that this world can give.

It is in such moments, that admonition finds the readiest access, and leaves the most permanent impressions on the heart. It has accordingly been strongly recommended to the teachers of religion, by men whose opinions are entitled to the highest respect,* to avail themselves of the opportunities they may possess, to give additional force and efficacy to the instructions which they wish to communicate, by judiciously advertent to such recent events, as excite the general sympathy of mankind, and render their minds more susceptible of salutary impressions.

An event of the most appalling description, you are all aware, has recently spread consternation throughout this city. Buried, as yet, in the profoundest mystery; and combining so many circumstances that are at once calculated to awaken the most indignant feelings, against the cold-blooded perpetrator of one of the most deliberate and foulest deeds that stain the annals of human crime; and to ex-

* Sudden violent, and untimely deaths, or death accompanied by any circumstances of surprise, or irregularity, usually leave an impression upon a whole neighbourhood. A Christian teacher is wanting in attention to opportunities who does not avail himself of this impression. The uncertainty of life requires no proof, but the power and influence which this consideration shall obtain over the decisions of the mind will depend greatly upon the circumstances under which it is presented to the imagination. Discourses upon the subject come with tenfold force when they are directed to a heart already touched by some near, recent, and affecting example of human mortality.—PALLEY.

cite the deepest commiseration, for those whose hearts he hath torn with the bitterest anguish:—it would betray a callous indifference, approximating to the brutal insensibility of the assassin himself, to contemplate this event without concern—it would argue a most blameable disrespect for the intimations of Providence to allow it to pass over, without attempting to profit by those lessons, which, doubtless, the all-wise Disposer of events, in the permission of such a melancholy catastrophe, intended to convey unto us.

I regret, my brethren, that I am so ill-qualified to lead those emotions, which this awful occurrence must have awakened in your minds, into proper channels. Stunned and confounded as my mind, for the last few days, has been, and incapable even of ordinary exercise; I shall obtain more than I can reasonably hope for, if the imperfect observations that I now make, shall suggest any thing which you may follow up for yourselves, in your hours of meditation and retirement, and improve to your own advantage. The subject is pregnant with useful instruction:—the suddenness, the awfulness, indeed, every feature of this solemn visitation is calculated to leave the deepest, and if, by the Spirit of God, sanctified unto us, the most salutary impressions upon our hearts.

We cannot but deplore an occurrence which has deprived us all, of the services of an honest man and a worthy citizen—and many of us, of the society and sympathies, of an amiable and kind-hearted friend. But let us not waste our time in vain—vain, because unavailing, regret. Rather let us endeavour to recognise in this transaction, the finger of God; and though we may not be able to explore the reason of his conduct, we may improve it to our advantage; and obtain those consolations which will enable us, with patience and resignation, to submit to his will.

It has often occurred to me, that there is perhaps nothing in the whole compass of Divine Providence, where the goodness of the Deity

is more conspicuously displayed, than in the mode in which he inflicts the wages of sin. All mankind, in consequence of their disobedience, were doomed to sorrow and suffering, and finally to death; yet these circumstances, which we are apt to regard as our bitterest afflictions, are converted by infinite mercy into positive good. Hard of heart as we are, we can believe that "the light afflictions, which are but for a moment," are all productive of the good of them who are in Christ Jesus; and short-sighted as we are, we can perceive, even from the darkness of death, to emanate our most substantial blessings. Death, to the upright, is the welcome messenger of peace, which transfers them from sublunary wo to enduring felicity; and, at the same time, is the impressive teacher of the most important lessons to all those, who are for a little spared from his rapacity. The daily demonstrations of his power, especially when he comes forth invested with the attributes of terror, lead us to put a proper estimate both on the things of this world, and of the next—warn us to repress our unruly appetites and passions, the indulgence of which would eventually become our greatest misery; and stimulate us to the acquisition of qualities, which could not be effected without the dissolution of the body. When the mind, at the same time, is softened by sorrow for the friends, whom, with our bodily eyes, we no longer behold, it naturally turns in pensive contemplation to that land of Spirits whither they are gone, and dwells on its delights with peaceful complacency; and is seldom diverted till it catches something of the spirit which pervades every bosom there.

Were it not for that selfishness, which is inseparable from our present condition, there is nothing in our temporary separation from our Christian friends by death, that would excite our sorrow. Were we to consider the event, merely in reference to those who are no longer with us, instead of being a matter for condolence, would be a cause for congratulation, for what is there in this weary, trifling world, which should so attach us to it, that we would wish those, whom we dearly love, to live here always? But, while we remain on earth, there

must always be something earthly about us—some characteristic feature of the country and clime to which we belong—something to attach us to those scenes, that are associated with all that we have yet experienced of happiness. I know no ties which bind us stronger to the world, than the ties of consanguinity and friendship—nothing that will more clearly evince what kind of people we are, than the little sympathies and endearments which such connections excite. There must, then, be always something inexpressibly acute in the pangs of separation from those, with whose existence is associated our holiest and happiest days,—nor are we commanded to repress those tender emotions which spring up in the mind on such occasions. On the contrary, we are permitted to sorrow, “but not as those who are without hope;”—and we read of Him, who was without sin, having wept at the tomb of his friend.

While, therefore, on the present occasion, we may with propriety indulge the amiable weaknesses of our nature, we ought not to permit the swollen tide of our grief, unassuaged by the consolations of religion, to flow darkly and silently on:—for God hath not called him hence without leaving us the well-grounded hope, that he was made meet, by the merits of his Redeemer, to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Why, then, should we regret his departure from this wicked world? He is now far beyond the cares and troubles which are the inseparable concomitants of mortal life; and if our kindness cannot extend to him, neither will the deadly malice of the revengeful reach him any more.

While he continued with us as a pilgrim on this earth, he conducted himself so meekly and uprightly, that it is a matter of astonishment to all that one so inoffensive and kind should be the victim of such inhuman ferocity. From the particular walk to which my intercourse with society has been chiefly confined, and being a stranger, in a great measure, to the transactions of the mercantile world; I cannot venture from my own personal knowledge and

experience, to pronounce any judgment in that respect, on the principles and character of him who is now departed ; but I know that the universal sentiment among those who knew him best, is most strongly in his favour, and has been expressed in a manner the most honourable to his memory, and the most gratifying to his sorrowing friends ; in the deep commiseration with his fate, and their bereavement ; which you have all manifested on this mournful occasion. His private life was no less distinguished by the strict and faithful discharge of those relative duties, which as a husband, a son, a brother, and a friend, were incumbent upon him. It is in the hours of free and unfettered communion of thought and feeling, that the genuine dispositions of the heart are most clearly seen ; and in such circumstances, I have had an opportunity more than once, of ascertaining what were his, and I think it by no means degrades the sanctity of the place where I stand, that I now bear my feeble testimony to his departed worth. Possessed of a taste for reading, his mind was more enlarged, and his views more comprehensive and enlightened, than is generally the case among men in the same sphere of life. His affections were ardent, and his charity extended to all,—I mean not, (though his hand was liberal,) the mere circumstance of affording pecuniary relief, but that general expression of a benevolent and humane heart, which showed itself in talking evil of no one—in wishing well to all—and in a promptness to perform, in so far as lay in his power, whatever would in any degree tend to the real welfare of others. Possessed of as delicate a sense of honour as I have seen exhibited by any individual, that attribute was also combined with a generosity which rendered him peculiarly alive to the sufferings of the oppressed ; and I must say, if ever I observed that most imperturbable good nature which characterised him in any degree shaded—for ruffled it was not—it was once when he expressed his indignation at a case of cruelty and oppression which had come under his own knowledge. His religious opinions, I have every reason to believe, were correct, and his sentiments sincere. His wish was I know, that these should be founded entirely on the bible, without

any undue regard to the conflicting opinions of men—though, at the same time, he was always ready to pay a due deference to the opinions of those who were reputed for wisdom and information. If his piety seemed to any one less intense than perhaps they would have wished, I am persuaded that it was more so in appearance than reality; and that such impressions, if they have been entertained, have, in a great degree, if not altogether, arisen from the extreme modesty, and abhorrence of hypocrisy, which led him frequently to talk, and to think meanly of his own attainments in the Christian life, and scrupulously to avoid every thing like ostentation. I shall not soon forget some happy hours I have enjoyed in his society – and an intimacy that was fast ripening into friendship. I shall never forget the innocent, the interesting conversation, which preceded that awful moment when the thunders of the cowardly, cold-blooded assassin, so suddenly interrupted the tranquillity of our domestic repose; and introduced death, and lamentation, and wo—literally in the manner expressed in our text,—among those who, but a moment before, felt perfectly secure from harm and happy in each other's society.

How mysterious often are the ways of Providence, in permitting those to be the victims of the keenest resentment and implacable hatred, whose unassuming and peaceable deportment, render them the least likely to give offence, or awaken hostilities of any sort. Indeed if we limit our views of those dark dispensations which are so frequent in life, to the short space of mortal existence, we will find it difficult to reconcile the manifold evils which man is destined to suffer, with the belief that there is an infinitely perfect Being who superintends every event, and who regards us with all the tenderness and solicitude of a father. But when viewed in connexion with that eternity of being which the scriptures of truth reveal, the doubts and darkness which invest them, in a great degree disappear; and though, from the weakness and imperfection of our faculties, we may not be able fully to comprehend, or to trace out all the designs of Providence

in those dispensations which come under our observation, still we see enough to satisfy us of the wisdom that appoints them, and to reconcile us to our lot.

If men, like the inferior animals, were capable only of bodily enjoyments, and destined only for a mortal existence, then, indeed, an uninterrupted series of corporeal pleasures would be a token of their Creator's love. But if formed for the purer and more exalted pleasures of a highly cultivated mind, and destined for immortality, prosperity may be a retributive punishment of the bitterest kind—the most awful expression of divine wrath:—for those, who bask in its uninterrupted sunshine, are more apt to be betrayed into crimes—to become hardened in habits of impiety, and to frustrate their hopes of a blessed immortality, by rendering themselves incapable of enjoying what constitutes the true happiness of their nature.

While uninterrupted prosperity has thus a fearful tendency to produce the most deplorable consequences in the human character, those appointments of Providence, on the other hand, which we are apt to regard as our greatest calamities, are really blessings in disguise, from their apposite and happy tendency: they lessen the influence which worldly objects have upon the mind, and lead back the wandering soul to the bosom of its God. We need not, therefore, be surprised, if we find the righteous man often depressed, and humbled under the burden of adversity; and the wicked highly exalted, and rioting in all the luxury of sensual gratification. Such circumstances are necessary to a state of probation. They are materials by which we are tried and prepared for another world. They put our principles to the test, and prove whether our conduct is regulated by the word of God and the dictates of reason; or is swayed by the pleasures and fascinations of life.

These remarks, supported as they are by the testimony of Scripture, “that it is good for a man to be afflicted:”—“that the Lord

chasteneth those whom he loves;" and though "no chastising for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterwards, it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby"—show us that adversity is by no means expressive of the divine hatred, but intended for the best of purposes. We cannot therefore entertain a doubt, but the late awful visitation was intended by God for our moral improvement; and though we may not be able to trace all his secret designs respecting it, let us humbly learn from it those more obvious lessons which it so forcibly conveys.

I. It gives us a striking proof of the frailty and uncertainty of human life. This is a truth of the most momentous importance; and though it is one of which we are often reminded, yet, from the propensity of men to disregard it, it is impossible that it can be too frequently brought under their consideration,—especially when combined with such circumstances as are likely to prepare the mind for its reception, and the more effectual exercise of its influences.

It is indeed a strange phenomenon, that beings endowed with reason, and constituted for happiness, and who daily give most unequivocal proofs that all their desires are fixed upon it, and that all their exertions are directed to its attainment, should yet overlook, and disregard those objects which can alone bestow it; and expend all their energy in the pursuit of those which will infallibly disappoint them, or, at most, yield them the good which they seek in a very limited and transient degree. The impress of mutability and uncertainty is stamped upon every thing earthly that solicit our regards; and if our supreme affections are centred upon them, we will infallibly deprive ourselves of that share of happiness, which a subordinate attachment to them is calculated to produce. They have not that combination of qualities that constitute true happiness. It is reality, and satisfaction, and perpetuity that form its essential elements—none of these, taken singly, can confer it—in perfect union, they

do. It is only into the comfort and the joy which religion confers, that all these elements of happiness fully enter. In many of our earthly enjoyments, they have no place whatever, further, than that which imagination gives them; and even in those pleasures, which flow from the noblest and most dignified of our worldly pursuits, they enter but in a very limited degree—a degree necessarily limited by the imperfection of our nature, and the short duration of our present precarious existence. They are, therefore, incapable of yielding that unalloyed felicity which they promise, and which we credulously, and against all experience, expect to receive from them. How soon do the objects of our tenderest affections lose all their attractions! How often, while they are yet gazed on with transports of delight, are the gay, and the lovely scenes of nature involved in confusion and ruin by their own jarring elements! How liable are we all to be torn, by some unexpected, and unavoidable vicissitude, from scenes endeared to us by many a fond association! The shafts of death fly thick, and thousands fall around us on every side; and the strongest and the healthiest, have no assurance of longer life than the weakest and the frailest. Death levels all with an indiscriminating hand. The prince and the peasant—the tyrant and the slave—the young and the old—alike must yield to his stern command. How often is the affectionate child deprived of the tender solicitude and protection of his parents, ere yet his heart has been taught to know another object of attachment! How often is the agonized parent doomed to watch the expiring breath, and to weep over the last convulsive struggle, of his darling child—to respond to his every groan of anguish, by a fervent prayer to that almighty Being, in whose hands are the issues of life, that he would be pleased no longer to protract his infant's painful sufferings, but would take forever from his sight in this world, him in whom, perhaps, all his earthly hopes were concentrated! who, but a few days before, while buoyant with health and spirits, he beheld with all the pride and partiality of a parent, and pictured as the comfort of his future life, and the stay of his declining years! How often are we destined to watch, with

painful anxiety, the slow progress of disease, drinking up the strength of those in whom we are most tenderly interested, and "withering the bloom of their beauty, as a flower of the field that is cut down, and perishing in its sweetness!" How often does some sad, sudden, and unexpected calamity, cut off, in the full vigour of manhood, and in the possession of perfect health, those to whom we looked for protection or friendly advice! The companions of our youth, where are they?—gone into the land of forgetfulness. Those whose friendship gilded with joy our early days, and which, we fondly hoped, would have shed a peaceful serenity over our last moments,—how rapidly in succession have they disappeared from our side! How many of them are now slumbering in the dark and narrow house appointed for all living!

Surely, of all the pleasures which have no relation but to the present life, and which are derived exclusively from objects of the present world, those which spring from the sympathies and endearments of domestic retirement, are the purest and the most satisfactory. Yet even these, we find, are mingled with much imperfection, and are all transitory and perishable—liable to be torn from us by the ruthless hand of kindred flesh. The contemplation of such a scene, though well calculated to awaken in every heart, not utterly dead to the feelings of humanity, a corresponding joy; only excites in the dark soul of the prowling murderer, as he eyes it through the lattice, a diabolical extacy, that such unsuspecting security, as he beholds, affords him a fitter opportunity, to give an awful expression to his implacable hatred, by a deed, from which recollection turns away with horror, and the mind sickens to contemplate.

Though it is a deed which gives us a shocking picture of human depravity, it also affords us a proof, no less striking, of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and of the unsatisfactory nature of all sublunary enjoyments. It is an uncertainty, it is an unsatisfactoriness impressed upon them by the hand of God himself, to attest that

these are not the legitimate objects of our supreme attachment, however much a moderate participation of them, may enhance every enjoyment, and lighten every affliction in life. It is an uncertainty—it is an unsatisfactoriness,—interwoven with their very nature, to be a means of reclaiming our estranged affections, and leading them back to Him whose transcendent excellencies can alone satisfy the desires of our immortal souls, and yet leave no void. Nothing else can afford that happiness which is adapted to their nature, and commensurate with their existence. That excellence which is subject to no mutability, which exists from eternity to eternity, can alone present to them such new emanations as will be sufficient to satisfy their ever expanding capacities; and it is only in the divine excellence that such a fullness dwells—a fullness which will be adequate to their increasing desires, notwithstanding their perfectibility and the eternity of their duration—yes, though their progress to perfection were fleet as the lightnings of heaven.

II. While that mournful event, which we all deplore, in the language of the most solemn admonition, warns us of the frailty and uncertainty of life, and all its enjoyments; it no less forcibly enjoins us to eradicate from the heart every malevolent feeling the moment it springs up. It is the indulgence of these, that leads men, through a series of crimes of increasing enormity, to the perpetration of the most atrocious deeds. If they are not, in their first movements, resisted and overcome, they will acquire a strength, by indulgence, which will be impossible to subdue; and, in the gradual degradation of character which they produce, will soon fearfully manifest to what an awful extent human depravity may reach. Knowing how easily, and how soon, bad thoughts and feelings ripen into bad deeds, our Saviour laid his interdictions on those very springs of action. He declared their character to be equally malignant and reprehensible, with the actual offences which they induced, and denounced the same punishment against them. Maintain, therefore, a watchful jealousy over every movement of your hearts, and let no feeling harbour

there, but what will stand the scrutiny of a dying hour. Be assured there is an absolute necessity for the strictest attention, for your nature is not now, what it was when recent from the creative hand of the Almighty. Those principles, which were given you for the progressive excellence and perfection of your nature, are degraded and perverted. Your appetites and passions, are ready to spurn the control, both of reason and revelation, and to aspire at an absolute sovereignty over the soul; and, unless held in severe and salutary restraint, will, with the impetuosity and violence of an overwhelming flood, burst in upon the privacies and securities of society, and bring unutterable misery upon others, and entail the most dreadful calamities upon yourselves. Suppress, therefore, at once, every propensity to vice before it obtain uncontrollable sway—for, if you do not, such is the tendency of moral evil to strengthen and perpetuate itself, that you will run the greatest hazard, of exemplifying in your persons, that degradation of character which you may, at the present moment, shudder to contemplate. A change of external circumstances easily unsettles what seems now to be the firm purpose of the heart; and, through almost imperceptible gradations, leads to the most consummate wickedness. When the prophet, Elisha, told Hazael what he would do to the children of Israel,—“that their strong holds he would set on fire, and that their young men he would slay with the sword, and that he would dash their children, and rip up the women with child,”—his heart, not yet inured to such wickedness, and untainted with ambition, shrunk with inward horror from the thought; and he indignantly replied to the prophet, “what! is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?” But the sequel of his history informs us, that he lived to perpetrate those atrocious deeds which Elisha had foretold. Nor, is it at once that the assassin reaches the very acme of wickedness. Dark and ferocious as his dispositions ultimately become, once he was a little child—one of those whose simplicity and innocence so much delights us, and whom our Saviour himself deigned to take into his arms and bless, and to exhibit their artless unsophisticated dispositions to those who would inherit his kingdom,

as models to copy after. But oh ! how unlike him whose infant heart would shudder at the tale of cruelty, and weep at every aspect of wo, is he whose heart, by growing crimes made harder than the adamant, and blacker than the shades of night in which he seeks to conceal his horrid purposes, could neither be touched with pity or compassion, by the tears of a widowed mother, bending under the load of years—nor the bitter anguish of a disconsolate wife, from her youth, yet unexperienced in the agitations and storms of life—whose relentless wrath, the prospect of an infant child, robbed of the guardianship and tender solicitude of a parent, could not quell—nor the image of God, defaced with sacrilegious hand, touch with remorse—who could ignobly submit to hear the lowest of mankind execrate his deeds—who could even impiously frown defiance on a righteous God !

Had the warning voice of conscience been regarded, when he first began to swerve from the commandments of his Creator ; and had he at its admonition sought by a timely repentance forgiving mercy, he would not now have to apprehend the terrors of an insulted law, and dread detection. But he scorned its friendly counsels, till at last its voice was hushed in the multiplicity of crimes, and it ceased, in a great measure, to judge or condemn what was flagitious or criminal, because it had long laboured in vain.

The silence of this internal monitor is to me a proof no less strong, that God, in the present order of things, manifests his abhorrence of sin, and that it shall by no means pass unpunished, than if it had continued to lift up its accusing voice. Were it always, and with equal energy, to exercise its power, it would, by an unreasonable indulgence to the perverseness and guilt of man, seem to intimate, if we may use such an expression, an over-weening desire in the divine mind, to deliver sinful spirits from the misery to which they were inveterately attached. The honor of his government, and the rectitude of his law, demand that the Deity shall not always strive

with the obstinately impenitent; and while he permits the "great vicegerent of Himself" within us, to cease from raising its warning voice, he plainly indicates, that there is a time beyond which his mercy will not extend; and that, wearied with their continued resistance to every means for their salvation, he will give them over to a reprobate mind—he silences the voice of conscience, that they may rush upon their misery, and experience, in a growing aversion to all that is good, that righteous retribution, with which God invariably visits iniquity.

Its voice, however, will not always slumber. It will yet arise in wrath, and shake with its terrors his guilty soul. I doubt not, but that ere this time, probably at this moment, its stings are secretly felt, and perhaps more severely than imagination can pourtray. It may not yet have fastened the fangs of remorse and despair, which are the most horrible and deadly. These, in dread retribution, may be reserved to embitter the anguish of a dying hour; but, I doubt not, that it has already awakened, at least, the apprehension of detection, and the gloomy forebodings that sometime or other, while in this life, the punishment which it justly merits will be inflicted. Although the just desert of sin cannot possibly be received in this life--and, O! that we could hope, foul as the deed was with the spirit of hell, that the wretched sinner might still be as a brand plucked from the burning, yet God hath so ordered it, that atrocious crimes are seldom or never concealed, and, indeed, it seems to be necessary for the general peace and tranquility of society, that it should be so: for we find men often become so hardened in sin, that they bring themselves to believe, that God will never require an account of their actions. "Wherefore is it," says the pious psalmist, "that the wicked contemn God?—he hath said in his heart he will not require it." "They encourage themselves in an evil matter; they commune by laying snares privily; they say, who shall see us?"—"He hath said in his heart God hath forgotten; he hideth his face; he will never see it." Thus freed from the salutary restraint which a sense of the divine perfections,

and the anticipation of a future judgment, impose on their lawless propensities—it *can*, therefore, only be the dread of an earthly tribunal, that *can* arrest *their* evil intentions; and the providence of God has been so often, and so signally displayed in bringing to light murders, and other enormous crimes that were secretly contrived and perpetrated in darkness, that it has passed into a common proverb that “atrocious crimes will out.” The terror which generally attends the commission of sin, when once awakened, will not therefore be at all quelled by the consideration, that it is thoroughly concealed from the knowledge of the world, and that no eye has been witness to it, but that eye that never slumbers nor sleeps. It will obtrude even on those hours of folly and dissipation, which will be eagerly sought after in order to repress it; but when the mind is left to reflect in solitude—when the world has withdrawn all its delusive pleasures—when the cold hand of death presses heavy upon us, and the recollections of the past, and the anticipations of the future, will irresistibly force themselves upon the mind;—then will it be also, that the misery, which results from the consciousness of having impiously and impenitently contemned the law of the Almighty, will be felt in all its bitterness.

Such considerations, surely, ought to lead us to reflect seriously on our own state,—to examine, with the strictest impartiality, whether we have been resisting the dictates of conscience, hardening in habits of impiety, and “treasuring up for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” We see in that fatal event, to which we have so often adverted, that there is a peculiar necessity for considering our ways; and watching over our hearts, with all diligence, for out of these are the issues of life.

I intended to have made, a few observations, more pointedly to illustrate the beneficial effects of the afflictive dispensations of the Almighty, with a view to lead you to that firm belief in his pro-

vidence, and humble trust in his mercy, which can alone soothe and console the unavoidable woes of humanity ; but I have already trespasssed too long upon your time and attention.

Permit me shortly to remind you, that such views of the divine perfections, and of a moral government, as will lead to true comfort and consolation, can only be derived from the word of God,—that, he assures us remains from generation to generation—unchanged and unchangeable, amid all the fluctuations and vicissitudes of time, to console our wretchedness, and animate us with the prospects of a happy immortality, and the promises of heavenly aid. Reason and philosophy may suggest such considerations as lead us to conceal our sorrows, but will never effectually console them. The mind, under affliction, is generally but little disposed to relish their cold comforts—but what they cannot bestow, the word of God effectually does. There, he hath provided a balm for every wound ; consolation for every sorrow ; enough to satisfy every desire, and to expel every fear. There the God of heaven and of earth, graciously reveals himself as the Father of the fatherless, the judge of the widow, and the orphan's stay. There, the disconsolate mother may obtain the full assurance, that He, who knows all her griefs, and, who in the hour of death, committed his own mother to the charge of a beloved disciple, will never overlook her cause. There, the consolatory hope is given that death-divided friends shall meet to part no more.

That these consolations may be yours, surrender yourselves wholly to their power ; for they are joys with which a stranger intermeddleth not. And may God grant, that, when the trials and agitations of time shall have ceased for ever, we may all be reunited with those objects of our love and affection, who now cease from their labours ; and be admitted in peace into his presence who shall wipe away every tear from our eyes !